

## Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 MOSCOW 15292 282009Z

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AMEMBASSY WARSAW

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 15292

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, UR

SUBJ: SOVIET ART SCENE: FALL 1976

1. SUMMARY. THE SOVIET ART SCENE IS MARKED BY QUIET TENSION AS MOST MUSCOVITE ARTISTS AWAIT A CHANGE, PROBABLY FOR THE WORSE. IN OFFICIAL POLICY TOWARD ART. MANY UNOFFICIAL ARTISTS HAVE RECENTLY JOINED PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND FIND THE FRUITS OF THIS ASSOCIATION SWEET, THOUGH ARTISTS CLAIM TO BE PRESERVING THEIR ARTISTIC INDEPENDENCE. OFFICIAL POLICY TOWARD ART HAS SUCCESSFULLY DEFUSED, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY, THE POTENTIAL FOR DISSIDENT ACTIVITIES, E.G. ON SEPT 15 ANNIVERSARY OF "BULLDOZER" EXHIBITION. END SUMMARY.

2. THE SOVIET ART YEAR BEGINS IN THE FALL. ON THE SURFACE IT HAS BEEN A REMARKABLY QUIET AND RELAXED BEGINNING. THE SOCIAL REALISTS AND OTHER OFFICIAL ARTISTS HAVE HAD

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 MOSCOW 15292 282009Z

SEVERAL BIG EXHIBITIONS, INCLUDING ONE AT THE MANEZH

(MOSCOW 14602, NOTAL). THE "LEFT WING" OF THE MOSCOW UNION OF ARTISTS ALSO RECEIVED PERMISSION TO STAGE AN EXHIBITION (MOSCOW 13354, NOTAL), WHICH WAS ACCOUNTED A LIMITED SUCCESS BY THE YOUNGER AND MORE DARING OFFICIAL ARTISTS. UNOFFICIAL ARTISTS TELL US THAT THEY TAKE PLEASURE IN THE FACT THAT THE EXHIBITION WAS HELD, ALTHOUGH THEY DOWNPLAY ITS SIGNIFICANCE AND SOME CRITICIZE THE QUALITY OF MUCH OF THE WORK ON DISPLAY.

3. THE ACTIVITIES OF NONOFFICIAL ARTISTS GIVE THE MOSCOW ART SCENE ITS INTEREST. A SKILLFULLY EXECUTED POLICY BY SOVIET ART AUTHORITIES HAS REDUCED THE NUMBER OF POTENTIAL DISSIDENT ARTISTS TO PRACTICALLY NIL. EXCEPT FOR A SMALL GROUP AROUND OSKAR RABIN, NEARLY ALL THE MORE IMPORTANT MOSCOW ARTISTS ARE NOW MEMBERS OF EITHER THE PRESTIGIOUS UNION OF ARTISTS OR THE LESS PRESTIGIOUS (BUT MORE PERMISSIVE AND FREE WHEELING) UNION OF GRAPHIC ARTS. MANY HITHERTO UNOFFICIAL ARTISTS HAVE JOINED IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS. ONE PERCEIVED ADVANTAGE OF JOINING, EVEN THE GRAPHIC ARTS UNION, WHICH IS THEORETICALLY COMPOSED OF WORKERS IN THE ANCILLARY TRADES--PRINTERS, ETC.--IS THAT MEMBERSHIP IS THOUGHT TO PROTECT OTHERWISE UNEMPLOYED ARTISTS FROM PROSECUTION UNDER THE ANTI-PARASITE LAWS. IN ADDITION, OVER THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS, THE AUTHORITIES HAVE OFFERED THE UNIONS' ARTISTS A NUMBER OF "INDUCEMENTS": ALL-EXPENSE PAID TRIPS TO VARIOUS PARTS OF THE SOVIET UNION, SOME TRIPS ABROAD TO THE SOCIALIST COUNTRIES, GUARANTEES OF PURCHASE OF ART WORKS, AND OFFERS OF NEW AND BETTER STUDIOS. THE ARTISTS HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT THEY WILL BE LEFT ALONE TO CREATE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR OWN DESIRES AND THAT THEIR WORKS WILL BE BOUGHT WHATEVER THEIR NATURE (ALTHOUGH NO GUARANTEES ARE GIVEN ABOUT SUBSEQUENT EXHIBITIONS OF THEM).

4. ONE RESULT OF THIS POLICY IS ALREADY CLEAR. THE AUTHORITIES HAVE MANAGED TO TURN OFF ANY MOVEMENT TO HOLD A LARGE SCALE "UNOFFICIAL" EXHIBITION SIMILAR TO THOSE HELD IN THE VDNKH LAST YEAR AND IN 1974. A FLURRY OF RUMORS ABOUT A POSSIBLE EXHIBITION HAS NOW DIED DOWN, CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 MOSCOW 15292 282009Z

AND THOSE ARTISTS WHO NOURISHED HOPES THAT SUCH AN EXHIBIT MIGHT TAKE PLACE THIS YEAR ARE NOW RESIGNED TO ITS ABSENCE. SIMILARLY, THE "CARROT" OF THE IMPROVED WORKING CONDITIONS MENTIONED ABOVE (AND THE "STICK" OF SOME DISCREET THREATS) HAVE ENABLED THE AUTHORITIES TO AVOID ANY ATTEMPT ON THE PART OF THE ACTIVIST ELEMENT IN THE MOSCOW DISSIDENT ART WORLD TO HOLD ANY EXHIBIT OR DEMONSTRATION ON SEPT 15, THE SECOND ANNIVER-

SARY OF THE FAMOUS "BULLDOZER" EXHIBIT OF 1974.

5. IN A RELATED DEVELOPMENT, SEVERAL OF THE MORE IMPORTANT AND ARTICULATE ARTISTS HAVE NOW LEFT THE SOVIET UNION. THE DEPARTURE OF MASTERKOVA AND SYTNIKOV DEPRIVED THE ART WORKLD OF TWO OF ITS MORE REMARKABLE MEMBERS. NEIZVESTNIY'S DEPARTURE MEANT THAT A PARTICULARLY ARTICULATE ARTIST, WITH CLOSE OFFICIAL AS WELL AS WESTERN CONNECTIONS, HAS NOW LEFT THE SCENE. SUCH DEPARTURES (ESPECIALLY NEIZVESTNIY'S) DEPRIVE THE ART WORLD OF IMPORTANT RALLYING POINTS.

6. DESPITE THE APPARENT CALM IN THE ART WORLD, OUR ARTISTIC CONTACTS ALL SPEAK OF A TENSION WHICH THEY FEEL. ARTISTS ARE CONVINCED THAT THE COOPTATION OF DISSIDENTS INTO THE PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IS NOT INDICATIVE OF ANY BASIC CHANGE EITHER IN THE CANONS OF SOVIET ART OR IN HE PRACTICAL ADMINISTRATION OF ARTISTIC POLICY, THERE IS A GENERALIZED FEELING OF "WAITING FOR THE OTHER SHOE TO DROP". SEVERAL ARTISTS HAVE POINTED OUT THAT SINCE THE DEATH OF FURTSEVA THERE HAS, IN EFFECT BEEN NO MINISTER OF CULTURE AND NO REAL POLICY ARTICULATION. IT IS NOT CLAR HOW WELL MOSCOW ARTISTS REALLY KNOW DEMICHEV, THE INCUMBENT MINISTER, BUT THERE IS NEARLY UNANIMOUS OPINIONS THAT HE IS AMAN WHO IS OPPOSED TO EXPERIMENTATION INART, AND OPPOSED TO GIVING GREATER LATITUDE TO ARTISTS.

7. WHAT THE ARTISTS NOW SEE, IN OTHER WORDS, IS A CHANGE OF TACTICS, DESIGNED TO BREAK THE UNITED FRONT OF ARTISTS, RATHER THAN ANY CHANGE OF POLICY. SOME CONCESSIONS, IT IS ADMITTED, HAVE BEEN MADE AND THEY ARE IMPORTANT, BUT THEY ARE INTENDED TO SAP THE SOLIDARITY

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 MOSCOW 15292 282009Z

WHICH IMPELLED THE AUTHORITIES TO GRANT THE CONCESSIONS IN THE FIRST PLACE. OUR ARTISTIC CONTACTS GRANT THAT THE AUTHORITIES HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL INTHIS POLICY.

8. MANY OF OUR ARTISTIC CONTACTS FEEL THAT THIS IS NOT A GOOD MOMENT TO BE PERSONALLY ADVENTUROUS. AGITATION FOR POLICY CHANGES, AND OPPOSITION TO POLICY DECISIONS, THEREFORE, HAVE DROPPED OFF. FOR THE SAME REASONS, MANY ARTISTS, PARTICULARLY THE MORE EXPERIMENTAL ONES, ARE PRODUCING WORKS THAT THEY ARE NOT EVEN OFFERING TO THE OFFICIAL PURCHASING COMMISSIONS. THEY ARE PAINTING FOR THEMSELVES, AND IN A FEW CASES, EVEN REFUSE TO SHOW THEIR LATEST WORKS TO COLLEAGUES AND PRIVATE COLLECTORS.

9. MANY MOSCOW ARTISTS MAKE A DIRECT CONNECTION BETWEEN

HIGH-LEVEL LEADERSHIP CHANGES AND DECISIONS TAKEN IN THE CULTURAL FIELD, AND NEARLY ALL FEEL THAT THE PERIOD OF WAITING FOR A CHANGE IN THE BROAD LINES OF CULTURAL POLICY EVIDENT TO THEM SINCE BEFORE THE FEBRUARY PARTY CONGRESS, WILL CONTINUE UNTIL AFTER LEADERSHIP CHANGES HAVE BEEN MADE.

10. THUS, MOST ARTISTS WHEN QUERIED ABOUT THEIR FUTURE, SAY THAT THEY ARE DRAWING IN THEIR HORNS AND ATTEMPTING TO GET AS MUCH OUT OF THE SYSTEM AS THEY CAN NOW. BUT THEY FEEL THAT A CHANGE, PROBABLY ONE FOR THE WORSE, IS VERY MUCH IN THE AIR, AND ARE NOT OPTIMISTIC, EVEN AS THEY SAVOR THE SMALL SUCCESSES THEY HAVE GAINED, THAT THE OLD ELAN CAN BE RECREATED IN CASE OF NEED.  
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